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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship, or small business ownership, is an increasingly attractive option to young people and adults (including low-income populations, at-risk youth, and women) who are striving to find careers that are exciting to them and offer the potential for personal and financial success. Entrepreneurs must be self-starters, innovative, willing to try new things and take risks; they must be able to get along with others and be receptive to suggestions and criticism; they must be able to look at a situation, identify opportunities, gather resources, make business plans, and be persistent. Career and technical education (CTE) can help students develop these skills by integrating entrepreneurship education with academic and technical curricula that stresses financial, people management, interpersonal/communication, and business planning skills. Of significance in promoting entrepreneurship are curriculum approaches and delivery techniques that motivate students to stay connected to school and learn the skills required to succeed as small business owners. Flexibility in program structure and delivery, cultural competence, and collaboration are key components to entrepreneurship programs. (Contains 15 references.) (CG)

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by Bettina Lankard Brown
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The Role of CTE in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, or small business ownership, is an increasingly attractive option to young people as well as adults who are striving to find careers that are exciting to them and offer the potential for personal and financial success. In recent years, the majority of new jobs in both professional and technical areas have been in the small business sector (Scherrer 2002). In addition, over half of the U.S. private work force is employed in small businesses (Ries 2000). Low-income populations, at-risk youth, and women are especially attracted to entrepreneurial ventures as they offer an opportunity to apply creativity, risk-taking inclinations, and complex life experience to educational and career endeavors that have the potential to deliver them from poverty, uncertainty, and conflicts they experience in their current environments (Saboe, Kanter, and Walsh 2002; Stanforth and Muske 1999). For these populations, and for all students who are motivated to be self-employed, career and technical education (CTE) can provide the help they need to prepare for success as small business owners and operators.

This Digest reviews the literature on CTE's role in providing entrepreneurship education, including the behaviors and skills that contribute to entrepreneurial success, curriculum components and delivery strategies that have proven to be effective, and networking opportunities that offer students support they need to start their own businesses.

A Rationale for Providing Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education focuses on the start-up of new business ventures. It tends to draw the interest of students who want the opportunity to operate on their own, make money, and be successful. A Gallup survey of 600 high school students revealed that 7 of 10 had a desire to start their own businesses and gave "independence" as their major reason (Saboe et al. 2002). The characteristics, traits, and abilities of entrepreneurs are those that individuals in impoverished neighborhoods have learned, to some extent, on the street. These skills are ones that must be nurtured through proper education and coaching so that can be directed to responsible and enriching small business endeavors that will benefit the individuals and the communities in which they live (ibid.).

Entrepreneurs must be self-starters, innovative, willing to try new things and take risks; they must be able to get along well with others and be receptive to suggestions and criticism (Nelson and Johnson 1997; Stanforth and Muske 1999). They must be able to look at a situation, identify opportunities, gather resources, make business plans, and persistent in reaching their goals (ibid.). CTE can help students develop these skills by integrating entrepreneurship education with academic and technical curriculum that stresses financial, people management, interpersonal/communication, and business planning skills (Billett 2001).

CTE's Role in Helping Students Develop Core Entrepreneurial Skills

Several curriculum projects have had positive results in delivering entrepreneurial education. One is a Web-based business project that engaged students in teams, directing them to choose a business to develop and devise a business plan that would help them start up and run the business using information available through Web resources (Kavan and O'Hara 2003). In this process, students used the Small Business Administration loan guidelines to develop their business plans for obtaining funding. Stipulations of their business plans were that they must accomplish the following (ibid., pp. 41-42):

1. Convince the audience that they understand the business, including critical issues and the financial case
2. Demonstrate their credibility by the thoroughness of their fact gathering
3. Show that they can logically devise a business plan based upon the evidence generated
4. Help the audience understand the implications of the venture.

By participating in the project, students received exposure to the resources of the Web, developed an understanding of the various functional areas within a business and how these functions were interdependent, enhanced their electronic communication skills, and experienced the entrepreneurial behavioral, affective, and cognitive attitudes that motivate individuals to succeed in small business endeavors (ibid.).

Another school-based curriculum program that is designed to introduce participants to the skills required to start and run a business is the Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program (Hanham et al. 1999). Annually, the REAL organization provides hands-on instruction to more than 4,000 students nationwide at more than 400 high schools, community or technical colleges, universities, elementary and middle schools, and community organizations (National Alliance of Business 1999). REAL was evaluated through a demographic survey of 1,011 student participants and pre/posttest scores from 93. Community college students showed significant gains in communication skills, high school students in business knowledge. Community college students had greater gains than high school students in analytical and thinking skills.

Brown (2000b) identifies three components required for entrepreneurship education: opportunity recognition, marshaling and commitment of resources, and the creation of an operating business organization. Participation in these components requires students to develop skills in problem solving, decision making, teamwork, written communication, and public speaking (Scherrer 2002). Schools must provide students with current technology so that they can learn to create multimedia presentations, spreadsheets, and written documents (ibid.).

Entrepreneurship education, because it is especially well suited to interdisciplinary approaches, can be most effective when it is integrated into various courses in the school curriculum, e.g., marketing, communication, finance (Boethel 2000). Two programs that integrate entrepreneurship into the curricula through business education are the Program for Acquiring Competence in Entrepreneurship (PACE), Level 2, which engages older students in developing business plans; and Own The Place, which teaches students career skills and provides them with first-hand business experience (Brown 2000a).

For program developers who are considering the implementation of entrepreneurship curriculum, the ***National Standards for Business Education,*** developed by the National Business Education Association, offer guidelines for development (Scherrer 2002). Course units could include (1) a description of what businesses do and how they function. (2) explanations of the concepts of market share and market segmentation. (3) identification of the basics of marketing; (4) introduction to the concepts of supply and demand, (5) demonstration of successful management and motivational techniques, (6) strategies of financial planning, and (7) the process to be followed to develop a business plan (ibid.).

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One commercial program that has been highlighted in the literature is FastTrac™, a hands-on, noncredit entrepreneurship program which was initiated as part of the University of Southern California's Entrepreneurship Program in 1986 and is now available nationally through the sponsorship of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. "Today there are nine various FastTrac™ programs offered in both urban and rural settings through organizations and colleges/universities to help people pursue their entrepreneurship goals" (***FastTrac™ Fact Sheet*** 2001, p. 2). Information about FastTrac™ and its programs may be found at http://www.fasttrac.org.

Instructional strategies for delivering entrepreneurship education should engage students in experiential learning and lead them to observe, interpret, analyze, make decisions, and consider consequences (Daly 2001). Teaching strategies should contextualize learning, provide students with opportunities to work and reflection over an extended period of time, emphasize self-reliance and flexibility, provide diverse ways of learning, deliver prompt feedback, and contain ongoing assessment. By engaging students in entrepreneurship projects, teachers serve as facilitators, allowing students to construct their own knowledge through learning, application, action, review, and reflection (Dwerryhouse 2001).

The Role of Networking

Entrepreneurship education must include access to the community and to community leaders and businesses that care about promoting entrepreneurs in the local community. organizations that have a history of involvement are Chambers of Commerce, Small Business Development Centers, Women's and Minority Business Centers, community colleges and individual consultants (***FastTrac™*** 2001). Through such partnerships, instructors can expose students to successful small businesses, provide opportunities for students to practice their skills, enable students to become familiar with entrepreneurial and management tasks, and introduce students to contacts that they can draw upon to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams (Nelson and Johnson 1997).

Community partners could be recruited to host economic forums patterned after science fairs, hold business plan competitions, and sponsor youth entrepreneurship trade shows in which students could showcase their ideas. They could provide personnel to serve as guest speakers, mentors or judges; they could host field trips and provide seed capital to help students with business start-ups. There is a motivation for community enterprises to partner with educators to support entrepreneurship education: "With many communities facing a widening gulf between the haves and have nots, entrepreneurship education provides an option that can transform at-risk and underachieving students into a generation of successful business people and contributors to revitalized communities" (Saboe et al. 2002, p. 82).

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship education is of value to anyone who has an interest in being self-employed, especially those who are from low-income and minority populations and who have traditionally been underserved. Of significance in promoting entrepreneurship are curriculum approaches and delivery techniques that motivate students to stay connected to school and learn the skills required to succeed as small business owners. Flexibility in program structure and delivery, cultural competence, and collaboration are key components to entrepreneurship programs. School environments must nurture students' self-development and administrators must be willing to adapt traditional modes of operation to accommodate the program's needs (Boethel 2002).

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